

99-98

SIERRA CLUB KERN-KAWEAH CHAPTER

CALFED Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

March 29, 1999

Re: the CALFED Bay-Delta AC meetings of March 24 and 25 1999

Dear Mr. Madigan and BDAC Members:

Thank you for inviting the general public to tour Kern County water facilities March 24. I also enjoyed the March 25 meeting. Everyone had enough to say, so I saved my remarks for these pages.

The March 24 tour did not state that switching from low profit - high water use crops like cotton, rice, alfalfa and pasturage to crops that produce more revenue per unit water, primarily fruits, nuts and vegetables, is occurring; but, I think this trend began about 20 years ago and is happily accelerating. If there are any Sierra Clubbers still unaware of farmers efforts at drip irrigation and careful determination of the optimal amount of water to use, I will tell them about this tour.

In contrast to the drip irrigation, we saw several farm fields spraying water into the air at mid day. More embarrassing to me was the fountain in Centennial Gardens, a few blocks west of the March 25 meeting room. Even a city boy like me knows that no matter how much water that fountain slops on the sidewalk and gutter, nothing edible will ever grow. Such a display makes it hard to talk to people about low flow toilets and shower heads. The next time the City of Bakersfield holds hearings on a project like the Grand Canal - Port of Bakersfield shopping center, which the City says will evaporate 15 acre feet of water per year, I hope someone from CalFed will address them with more success than I have had.

Alex Hildebrand said the population of California is twelve times greater than it was when he was born. If any one stake holder group tells the public that the increase in California population predicted for the next few decades increases water consumption by one million acre feet per decade, some of the general public will resent that stake holder group. I hope if all of us now join in a tactful campaign to ask people to limit births, folks will listen.

voluntarily

• MIDGEBUZZINGS •

One of the best investments anyone can make is in backpacking gear. My pack, for example, has given me twenty-five years of service, in all seasons, and still shows more promise of future hikes than I do. In fact, now that the time has come for me to hire a packer to carry my necessities into the high country, I can't think of a single item in my store of camping equipment that won't be just as useful under those circumstances as it was when I was carrying it myself.

The durability of good camping equipment is a kind of metaphor for the quality and strength of mountaineering friends. This summer, on a hike into the Kern Peak area of the Golden Trout Wilderness with Joe and Bugs Fontaine and several other exceptional people, I thought often of a phrase from the Old Testament: "There were giants in the earth in those days". These folks, most without the aid of walking sticks, could make their way up and across boulder fields with such dexterity and balance that their passage seemed effortless, though it certainly was not. For me, more a character out of one of the old fairytales than from an epic, boulder crossings were hampered by fragility both of temperament and of balance. But the others cheered me on, as I tapped with my two walking sticks, scraping and slipping, hesitating in uncertainty from one boulder to the next, and swaying under the influence of a flawed equilibrium. "You're doing great", they'd say. A couple of times someone relieved me of my pack, managing to do so without condescension.

Most heroic of all was Georgette Theotig, who shared her tent with me knowing full well from earlier experience that I have developed a snore like that of one of the giants from the Jack Tales. In fact, the sound can reach such volume and tenor that children, sleeping in other rooms and being awakened by it, have been known to shriek and fall out of their beds in terror and confusion.

Inspired by the guilt I felt over robbing Georgette of her sleep, I had a vivid dream on our last night out. I stole a car and hid it in my garage. Then it occurred to me that if the police found out what I had done, they would tell all of Bakersfield about it and I would spend the rest of my life in a chain gang, breaking up boulders. With that terrible thought, I looked up to the Panorama bluff and sure enough, there were several policemen standing around a big bonfire. They were sending smoke signals with a blanket, and this was the message floating over the town in gigantic letters: "S.H.O.O.T...A.N.N...W.I.L.L.I.A.M.S.". When I revealed the dream to Georgette the next morning she slipped out of character for a moment with an uncharitable truth: "I must have gotten into your dream; that's what I was thinking all week." It was a very slight slip considering what she had endured.

Good equipment and stout friends are the mainstays of backpacking, but the purpose for going is to experience together the great beauty of the mountains. In my next column I will share with you what we encountered, using permission from Eva Nipp to quote from her lyrical journal of nearly the same trip.

Tune in then for a real treat.

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"A little rebellion now and then is a good thing."

– Thomas Jefferson



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Negotiations are at the heart of the CalFed effort. My concept of negotiations is that what I have is mine but what you have is negotiable. For example, I could say California has 4,000 dams, counting little ones, now we can negotiate how many more to build. I hope BDAC members have a better concept than that.

Mr. Meacher mentioned the role of water sheds. I hope the ISI emphasizes that when forests, commonly found high in a watershed, are intact, they hold snow melt and water, delaying the onset, and slowing the rate of, the spring run off. This decreases the likelihood of flooding, makes the water arrive at lower levels later in the year when agriculture is more likely to need the water, and decreases siltation behind dams.

Water is to twenty first century California what oil was to twentieth century California. The combination of geology and location near water ways that makes the Kern Water Bank able to acquire and contain one million acre feet of water is unlikely to occur anywhere else. Nevertheless, all of California should be explored as thoroughly for underground water storage sites as it has been explored for oil.

I suspect Kern County and the City of Bakersfield allow land to be developed near the recharge area without being sure that it is useless for recharge. The City has just bulldozed along the south bank of the River, westward from the point where Stockdale Highway crosses the Kern River. The Kern River Freeway is planned to pave areas around Goose Lake Slough. Sometimes Caltrans says they will minimize the Freeway's interference with water recharge by elevating the Freeway. Please read an article in the Sunday, March 28, 1999 LA Times. Below the fold on the front page is a feature article -- "Sunday Report" --entitled "Dirty Little Secret". It's about the Century Freeway and how it's involvement with the water table is causing it to collapse. Perhaps the Department of Transportation should participate in CalFed. Certainly, local planners should hear from BDAC and staff about the necessity of preserving recharge areas.

Thank you,



Arthur D. Unger
2815 La Cresta Drive Bakersfield, CA 93305-1719

alunger@juno.com
(805) 323-5569

What we are all about...

John Muir founded the Sierra Club to enable future generations to explore, enjoy and protect the wildlands that are their heritage.

He felt that people should come as visitors to these places – the mountains, river canyons, coasts, deserts and swamps – to learn, not to leave marks.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SIERRA CLUB

- To Explore, Enjoy and Protect the wild places of the earth;
- To Practice and Promote responsible use of the earth's ecosystem and resources;
- To Educate and Enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and
- To Use All Lawful Means to carry out these objectives.

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*** HR 2077, Giant Sequoia Legislation introduced * –**

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to map the sequoia groves and draft a sequoia grove management plan. After seven years, still no forest wide sequoia plan has been written.

Current Forest Service definition of a "grove" is based on pacing 500 feet outside the nearest sequoia tree and posting a sign, outside of which logging and bulldozing continues as usual. The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) found that Sequoia National Forest's "grove" definition was not based on scientific criteria and urged that a cooperative of Forest Service, National Park and other sequoia experts work quickly to develop an ecologically sound basis for determining grove boundaries; this has not been done.

A grove is a complex relationship between clusters of Giant Sequoias mixed with ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white fir and incense cedar and deciduous species like oak and dogwood and includes crucial factors such as subterranean water flow. It is impossible to separate the sequoias from the Sierra Nevada ecosystem of which they are in integral part. This unique nature of the Giant Sequoia ecosystem is why full protection of the groves and the intertwining forest is essential.

Successful Tree Planting Near Frazier Park

By Mark Harper

A hearty and diverse group of Sierra Club members, along with "The Tree People" and the US Forest Service enjoyed a great morning planting trees near Frazier Park. The trees planted were pinyon pines grown in local schools and were actually planted in a burned area next to the community of Lake of the Woods.

We had a lot of fun planting the trees. It was amazing though how everyone had a slightly different philosophy in planting the small trees. Kevin Royle spent the morning high up on the side of the mountain planting. Kevin's theory being that his trees would regenerate the lower areas. Monte Harper felt that mulching the ground was so important the he was only able to plant two trees all morning ("just kidding Monte"). My son Matt and his friends sought out the softest soil where digging was easiest.

Several hundred trees were planted and the Forest Service really did provide a great lunch for all the helpers. Next year I hope to see some trees growing!

Editors note; I apologize to Mark for misplacing this article. I lost it in my "cyberspace", but luckily found it again to share it with you. The trip was held in March. Thanks again for your patience Mark!
– The Editor

Handwritten signature and initials.

RESOURCES

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